

9 Tips to Living Well with SCD in College

College students with sickle cell disease (SCD) can have a fun and safe college experience by taking a few safety precautions to keep themselves healthy.

SCD is an inherited blood disorder that can cause severe pain. So for students with SCD, the transition of leaving home to go to college can be a fun and exciting experience, but also challenging. By making smart health decisions, students with SCD can live full lives and enjoy their college experience. Read below to learn 9 tips on how students with SCD can stay safe and healthy while at school.

What health challenges can college students with SCD face?

Pain episodes (mild to severe pain caused by SCD) are the most common health problem and the #1 cause for emergency department visits among adults with SCD. Students with SCD may also feel tired frequently, may need to take frequent breaks during exercise, and may not be able to participate in strenuous, high-impact physical activities. Students with SCD can better manage their pain episodes and other SCD-related problems by making smart health decisions.

9 Tips to Stay Healthy in College

- **Find Good Medical Care**

Before arriving on campus, find a doctor who is located near your college with knowledge and experience in treating people with SCD. Often, the best choice is to find a hematologist, a doctor who specializes in blood and blood diseases. However, if a hematologist is not available in the community, find a doctor who knows how to manage and treat SCD-related health problems.



- **Maintain and Update Medical Records**

Provide student health services with up-to-date medical records before arriving on campus each school year. The medical record should include a list of medicines you are taking. It is important to provide this information in the event of an emergency.



- **Practice Healthy Habits**

It is important to fuel your body properly. A healthy diet can help reduce the frequency of pain and other symptoms. Drink 8 to 10 glasses of water every day and choose healthier meal options. Snack on fruits and vegetables between classes and during late night study sessions. Make healthy eating more fun by preparing meals and snacks together with your friends.



- **Stay Active**

Regular exercise is important for everyone, including people with SCD. Drink plenty of water before, during, and after any type of physical activity and remember not to overdo it. Take breaks throughout exercise routines to avoid becoming overheated. Avoid extreme temperatures. Try not to get too hot or too cold. Do not be afraid to tell yourself, a workout buddy, or a coach that you need a break.



- **Prevent Infections**

Take precautions to prevent infections and illnesses. Wash your hands with soap regularly and practice good hygiene, especially while sharing spaces in dormitories, bathrooms, gyms, and classrooms. Common illnesses, such as the cold and flu, can be dangerous for people with SCD. Stay up-to-date with vaccinations (shots) before arriving on campus. Talk to your doctor about receiving flu and pneumococcal vaccines for more protection.



- **Manage Stress**

A busy schedule can be overwhelming and can often lead to stress. For students with SCD, stress can lead to more severe and frequent pain episodes and dangerous health problems. Find ways to manage stress by including times for rest in your schedule. Take a break to pick up a good book, listen to music, take a walk outside, or hang out with friends.



- **Create an On-Campus Support Network**

Create an on-campus support network by telling a friend, academic advisor, professor, or a health provider on campus (or any combination of these individuals) of your condition. Severe pain episodes and other complications from SCD can lead to emergencies. In the event of an emergency, the people in your on-campus support network should have the information to contact your family members and a physician if you are unable to do so yourself.



- **Connect with an Academic Advisor**

Connect with an academic advisor or an on-campus counselor and tell him or her about your condition. In the event of an emergency, you may be absent from class for an extended period of time. During this time, an academic advisor can advocate for you and keep you informed by being the main point of contact for professors and school personnel.



- **Join Support Groups**

Join support groups and community-based organizations for people with SCD in order to share your experiences with other people who have SCD. These groups can provide a sense of understanding and belonging, information on SCD, assistance, and support to help you manage your condition.



You can have a fun and safe college experience with SCD.

Smart health decisions can help you to manage your SCD and reduce the frequency of SCD-related health problems.

For more information, visit www.cdc.gov/healthyliving and www.cdc.gov/sicklecell